



## **Navajo Nation Council – Office of the Speaker**

Contact: Jerome Clark

Phone: (928) 871-7160

Cell: (928) 637-5603

[nnlb.communications@gmail.com](mailto:nnlb.communications@gmail.com)

[www.navajonationcouncil.org](http://www.navajonationcouncil.org)

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### **NEWS RELEASE:**

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## **Navajo Nation, City of Flagstaff to sign MOU to improve race relations**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Leaders from the city of Flagstaff, Ariz., and Navajo lawmakers have agreed to become partners in strengthening race relations between Navajos and other races in the largest border town situated east of the Navajo Nation.

A Memorandum of Understanding will be signed by Navajo Speaker Johnny Naize and Flagstaff Mayor Sara Presler on March 27 and will bind both governmental bodies to work toward a common goal.

“We are one great community,” Presler said. “This MOU is an important first step toward our communities listening to each other, working together, and helping each other and our great state of Arizona.”

“The city of Flagstaff and the Navajo Human Rights Commission understand that in order to achieve better race relations, both parties recognize that racism and discrimination occur by Navajos and non-Navajos, and is a sensitive matter,” the Memorandum of Understanding stated. “We must never forget the tragedies inflicted on Navajos and ensure the Navajo people’s stories are acknowledged and told in their individual and collective words.”

In February, the Flagstaff City Council approved the MOU unanimously and immediately acted in good faith of the agreement by inviting the involvement of the Navajo Human Rights Commission to be a part of the interview team to select the city's next police chief.

“City leaders in Flagstaff are going through the paperwork right now and scoring the candidates. When they find out who they want to pick they offer our human rights commission to weigh in on who seems to fit the position,” said Rodney Tahe, policy analyst with the Navajo Human Rights Commission.

Navajo Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler was instrumental in presenting the MOU attached in legislation to the Naa'bik'iyati Committee of the Navajo Council and secured unanimous consent to support the bill.

“The Navajo Human Rights Commission actively worked with the City of Flagstaff since spring of 2011 to provide a workable MOU for both governmental units,” Delegate Butler said. “The City of Flagstaff will be the sixth border town to enter into a MOU with the Navajo Nation, and will be the first Arizona border town to enter into an MOU.”

The memorandum points out that Northern Arizona University has one of the highest Native American student enrollments, and that their presence, and many other Native Americans living in and around the community maintain an integral role in creating and shaping the city.

The memo encourages city leaders and community members of Flagstaff to be aware of the history, heritage, and contributions of American Indians to the region.

Presler recalled that when she was elected mayor in 2008, she asked for the telephone number of the Navajo Nation president to establish a rapport with the sovereign nation; however, the phone number was not located on the city's Rolodex.

“That struck me as something that warranted my attention. Within the first six weeks, we made it a point to reach out and begin to establish meaningful relationships with the sovereign tribal nations within our region,” Presler said. “So to come from having to look-up a phone number to making this MOU approved is quite significant.

Memorandum of Understandings exist with border towns Grants, Gallup, Farmington, Bloomfield all located in New Mexico, and in Cortez, Colorado.

Media outlets are invited for the MOU signing taking place at Flagstaff City Hall Council Chambers on March 27 at 4 p.m.

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